

STATE OF THE TOWN 2021

I want to thank Dan Onofrio, Kate Pipa, and the Bridgeport Regional Business Council for hosting this event. I want to thank Newtown Savings Bank for presenting this event and for sponsoring my address this morning. Thank you to Sikorsky Credit Union and Aquarion Company for also sponsoring this event.

A very special thank you to all of you for joining me today.

It is my hope that next year, we can all come together and I can thank all of you face to face. Zoom is a wonderful tool and one that kept our community and so many others, functioning at a high level. Thanks to **Bill Chin and his IT team**, for making it easy for us. Nevertheless, it can't replace the impact of a face to face gathering but today we will do our best.

The Covid-19 pandemic will be featured prominently in my remarks. It has impacted everyone but none more so than those who lost loved ones. So, before I begin my presentation, I would like us all to observe a moment of silence for the residents of the greater Bridgeport area and all others who passed away as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. Thank you.

When I made this address in 2019, my closing words were “I respect our past, I have pride in our present and I am confident in our future. Trumbull truly is the place to be.”

I say to you today, in 2021, as we recover from a Pandemic the likes of which has not been seen in a Century, **Trumbull still is the place to be!**

VISION:

While some will speak in grandiose terms about their vision for the future, my vision for our Community is a simple one.

A safe community, welcoming to all, affordable to all, with excellent schools, ample recreation opportunities, and quality comprehensive services delivered in a fiscally conservative manner.

In other words, the kind of community where people want to live, raise their families, and conduct business. Not an extravagant vision but a real one. And it is happening right now.

It is no accident that Trumbull is second in the State for people moving in. Those new residents had many choices and they chose Trumbull. They chose Trumbull because they know, what we all know, that **Trumbull is the place to be.**

PANDEMIC:

Before we embark on any discussion of the Town we must address the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on our Community.

As we all know this virus knows no borders and attacked most violently the most vulnerable among us. My actions over the last year were guided by the principle that the health and safety of our citizens was our number one priority. We knew that by shared sacrifice and working together for a common goal that we would not only survive, but thrive.

With no playbook on which to rely and no precedents on which to draw, our employees and volunteers rose to the occasion and kept the functions of our government running smoothly. Most important, we kept both our employees and our citizens safe.

I can say without hesitation that I am incredibly grateful for and proud of our First Responders and Town Employees.

We all know the great work of our First Responders, the police, fire, emergency services, public works, health care workers, teachers, and essential workers. They have kept us safe no matter the circumstances they confronted. A thank you to these heroes is hardly enough.

We've had many heroes in our community this year, people who checked in on elderly neighbors, brought the needy food, cut their lawns and quietly assisted in so many ways. Our Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) and our Social Services Department have worked tirelessly to help deliver food and other resources to the needy in our community. Our residents have donated thousands

of dollars to our Food Pantry and I thank our State Representatives who ran weekly food drives.

Let me give you a few examples of the services provided to our residents by Social Services and our Senior Center:

500 home delivered meals every month since March 2020, a total of 7,500 meals

240 grocery bags every month since March 2020, a total of 3,600 bags

20 drive thru lunch and ice cream events for seniors each event averaged 150 seniors

123 Food Pantry clients with catered family dinners while in quarantine

1,014 seniors were assisted in making Covid-19 vaccination appointments

Offered financial assistance for utilities, rent, and medical expenses

Offered seniors a friendly phone call program

Hundreds of gift cards were donated and purchased for members of the community.

During this last year we continued to deliver services to our Community with no interruption. Our employees performed superbly. They have been resilient, inventive and accommodating.

Clearly, the unprecedeted times have created significant challenges for our business community, particularly our small businesses. Our economic and community development team developed a pro-active approach with our businesses by providing daily assistance in the form of resources, technical assistance, marketing, and other supports during this difficult time.

I want to thank you, our business community for working with us. You have donated meals, services, and so many other things to the most vulnerable. A heartfelt thank you for your generosity and perseverance.

We determined early on in this crisis to follow the science, State guidance and guidance from our local health department. As our knowledge increased and the guidance became more refined, we adjusted, demonstrating the kind of flexibility needed to successfully weather the storm. We acted with an abundance of

caution and that proved to be a successful strategy. We vowed to keep our citizens informed and we did.

Some of the actions we took were:

1. Modified Tax Deadlines
2. Conducted job fairs for unemployed residents
3. Kept Town Services Functioning using Hybrid scheduling for Employees
4. Implemented a Tax deferment program
5. Provided a Covid Testing Center at Unity Park for both residents and non-residents
6. Ran Successful vaccination programs by our Health department

On the Communication front some of the actions we took and continue to take are:

1. Regular robocalls to the community with Covid-19 Updates
2. Post cards to seniors
3. Daily updates on the town website and Facebook page
4. Town Hall meetings on Zoom

Obviously there was much more but our comprehensive approach proved to be successful.

While there is reason for optimism that the worst is behind us, we still need to maintain discipline and restraint. A special word of thanks to our citizens, who acted with discipline, resilience and with great care toward their neighbors. A community is made up of many things but the most important is its people. This pandemic brought out the best in our people.

Over 72% of our residents who are eligible to receive the COVID-19 vaccine have received at least the first dose. Over 60% are fully vaccinated.

It is the people that make Trumbull the place to be.

FINANCE:

As I speak about the financial health of Trumbull, I want to say thank you to Maria Pires and her staff. Preparing a budget as complex as that of Trumbull is no easy task in the best of times and doubly hard during times of crisis.

With unemployment hitting double figures, others taking salary reductions, and some of our businesses closing their doors, we vowed to have no tax increase this year while still investing in public safety, our schools and essential services.

We accomplished that by conservative budgeting and restrained spending. We also allocated 2.8 million from our healthy General Fund also known as our Rainy Day Fund to cover lost revenue and expenses. This was the right thing to do. I don't know a better example of an emergency situation.

The good news is that by exercising spending restraint, there appears to be a surplus in both the Town and Board of Education budgets. That will reduce the amount we will need to draw from the Rainy Day Fund and leave us with an estimated 22 million dollar Fund. That is a healthy 12% of our annual operating budget.

In the upcoming budget year we still are faced with challenges. We must budget conservatively giving our revenue generating services, such as EMS, an opportunity to fully recover. Like most communities, we have used federal stimulus monies to cover anticipated revenue shortfalls in the coming fiscal year.

The combination of stimulus monies, strong tax collection, and conservative budgeting has allowed us to fund our schools, public safety and essential services while keeping the tax increase below 2%.

We continue to fund our town and police pensions at the ARC. Both continue to improve and as a community we are committed to continue the process until both funds are 100% funded.

Our tax collection remains strong, our revenues will begin to rebound, our Fund Balance is healthy, and our economic activity is robust.

Financially, Trumbull is the place to be.

ECONOMIC GROWTH:

Through all of this year, our businesses, their ownership and employees, have shown a level of resilience and commitment indicative of entrepreneurs. As I said earlier, they found ways to deliver goods and services in safety. They adapted along the way and we want all of our businesses to know, we were with you then, we are with you now, and we will be with you in the future.

We set up a COVID business recovery page on our website containing information on financial, technical and industry resources. We continue to issue updates on new information that supports our long-term business recovery.

We will be launching our Local Meals program, which will provide \$200,000 dollars in lunches and dinners from Trumbull restaurants for our residents in need.

Our restaurants took advantage of the outdoor seating latitude and Prime One Eleven is investing in a permanent patio expansion, which has the community very excited. Parkers offered Provision Kits containing grocery items, even toilet paper, for curbside pick-up. Pure Poetry offered personal shopping and curbside pick-up for residents needing to buy gifts. We appreciate all of our businesses, their ingenuity, fortitude and commitment to Trumbull. They are another example of why **TRUMBULL IS THE PLACE TO BE**.

We have seen significant private development come to fruition this year. I want to thank all of our town departments and employees who have worked diligently to keep approvals, permits and inspections going during these difficult times. Who knew we would be doing FaceTime inspections a year ago? Our employees rose to the occasion and these projects continued on time.

The Ten Trumbull apartment complex is fully occupied, the River Valley Resort Community for individuals 55+ is completed and residents are beginning to move in. The Woodside complex on the site of the former Henderson Lumber Yard is 25% occupied and continuing construction. We are monitoring all of these projects closely to assess the impact on town services. So far, the data indicates these developments will net a significant positive contribution to our Grand List while providing housing diversity for residents to stay in town and for new residents to move to our great town.

We have commercial developments that have been completed or are nearing completion. We know the new Starbucks at 965 White Plains Road is extremely popular, more about that later! I will say the Plaza is bringing some new life to Trumbull center.

The former Marissa's restaurant site, now called Long Hill Market, is nearing completion and the new businesses are opening between now and the end of the summer. I hope you agree, the area is looking terrific. The new plaza is 85% leased already with ECCO restaurant coming this summer, Summer Evans Salon, a physical therapy practice, a boutique martial arts studio and the return of Dunkin Donuts with a drive thru.

We have other new businesses in town. Cappello Family Dentistry opened on Technology Drive in early December 2020. AFC Urgent care has taken the former Chip's restaurant space and is moving their corporate office staff to the space, Marianna's Pantry just opened in the former Mex on Main space. It is terrific! Trumbull Café and Grill will be moving to a beautiful new space in Trumbull Center next door to Ring's end. Mex on Main moved to new space at 123 Monroe Turnpike. In our Trumbull Corporate Park, Make-a-wish CT has created an extraordinary facility for their families; it is as if Disney World has come to Trumbull. Other small businesses are poised to open this year. We had three new corporations come to Trumbull and open over the past year creating over 250 new jobs. Amazon is at 7120 Main Street the site of the former Read's Warehouse. Power Home Remodeling has moved their headquarters and training center to the former Pilot Pen building in the Trumbull Corporate Park, and Image First Healthcare Laundry opened in the fall at 50 Commerce Drive in the Trumbull Corporate Park. Despite a tough year, Trumbull has welcomed new residential and commercial developments, new small businesses, and new corporations to town.

I am pleased to say, two long awaited traffic signals are at final design and we will be out to construction bid this summer. The installation of a light at the corner of Whitney Avenue and Main Street in Long Hill Green will improve traffic flow and safety. Extensive sidewalk installations are also funded and in design throughout Long Hill Green in order to make the area more walkable and realize the village

like atmosphere that is desired. We extended the sidewalks on Whitney Avenue from the commercial plaza to Dunellen Road. We are designing the next phase of sidewalk connection down Whitney Avenue to the trail.

The traffic light at the entrance to the Fitness Edge Plaza on Monroe Turnpike will finally be a reality. The trail will be redirected to this new light with a safe crosswalk for trail users. In Trumbull Center, Long Hill Green and on Monroe Turnpike, safely connecting our trail system to our commercial centers will be an asset for residents, visitors, and businesses.

While we have many accomplishments to be proud of, we have challenges ahead. Our largest taxpayer, the Westfield Trumbull Mall, like many mall properties across the country is facing with significant problems due to the impact of online shopping and the pandemic. The challenge is also an opportunity. You will recall our planning and zoning Commission rezoned the property to a mixed-use design district in 2018. In 2020, the planning and zoning commission approved the Residences on Main, a 260 unit, market rate apartment complex on the mall property. These were good first steps. We will be undertaking a world class planning study for the mall area and we are in the process of working with Senator Moore, the Department of Economic and Community Development, property owners and others to raise significant funding for this effort. The plan will develop a roadmap for the transformation of the property. The community will be fully engaged as this effort goes underway.

Similarly, the Trumbull Center corridor has challenges in terms of business occupancy, traffic, safety and aesthetics. Some of these challenges have been made more problematic recently by the popularity of the Starbucks drive thru. The Trumbull center corridor study is underway and will set out a roadmap for the vision for the area. A community meeting will be held in the coming months for broad input into steps forward, like in Long Hill Green and on the Route 111, we have been able to access funding and bring about improvements and transformation. I hope you will all be involved as we tackle our challenges together.

I just want to praise and thank our businesses and their employees again. I want to thank those investing in new projects in our town for their flexibility and

commitment during these unprecedeted times and our town staff for all they do. They are outstanding professionals who really rose to the occasion to keep businesses going.

I want to thank Rina Bakalar, her team and our Economic and Community Development Commission for their outstanding results. The efforts of Rina in particular cannot be overstated. Businesses in Trumbull could not have a better advocate. Our ability to keep taxes in check while improving services and our schools happens to a great degree because of the economic development she attracts and retains. I thank you and our taxpayers thank you too.

The business community continues to show confidence in our Town. They know, as we do, that economic growth is not sustainable with unchecked spending and dramatic tax increases. Our residents and our businesses alike demand fiscal prudence as the cornerstone of our budget process. **We have delivered and we will continue to do so.**

Businesses large and small know that Trumbull is the place to be.

INFRASTRUCTURE:

As I move to our infrastructure, a word of thanks to Public Works Director George Estrada and to our Parks and Recreation Director Dimitri Paris. They keep our roads passable in the worst of weather, maintain our roads and buildings and keep our beautiful parks clean and safe. They see to it that our recreation programs and pools run smoothly and efficiently. Too often we take their work for granted.

In difficult times, it is easy to postpone investment in the infrastructure of our community. I think that is a mistake. The longer you wait the worse it gets and the costs continue to climb.

I want to see our roads paved, the walkability of our town enhanced and our parks and public spaces maintained. We did and will continue to do so. Strobel Road, Chestnut Hill and Moose Hill Road have all been paved and reengineered. A light and turn lane was added at the intersection of Strobel Rd. and Daniels Farm Rd. to improve safety and traffic flow.

This year Teller Road will be repaved and our paving of Madison Avenue will continue. Our plan to pave our side roads continues and you can see the plan on the Town Website.

Many of these improvements are being done at no cost to the taxpayers but instead are being funded through a combination of Grants or State funding.

EDUCATION:

Our education system is a cornerstone of our Community. The excellence of our teachers coupled with outstanding administrators gives Trumbull a reputation for excellence in education. That well-earned reputation acts as a magnet for families looking for a system that will allow their children to reach their potential. A strong education system benefits everyone by enhancing property values attracting new citizens who bring new ideas and energy to our community.

This year was particularly challenging for our education system. The new Board of Education discovered fiscal practices that fell short of accepted accounting norms resulting in a potential deficit for the budget. I called for an operational audit and was supported by the Town Council. I am pleased to say that the Board of Education embraced the recommendations of the outside auditor and are implementing recommendations as we speak. In addition, with a healthy budget surplus, the BOE will be using some of those funds to replenish accounts that were depleted by the previous BOE. This will improve the financial health of the school system.

On top of that, a new Superintendent and business manager needed to be hired, a budget crafted, and remote and hybrid learning implemented. I am pleased to say that our system rose to the occasion.

The results speak for themselves. Our athletic teams continue to excel, our academic teams are in many instances, the gold standard to which other schools systems aspire, and our graduates continue to excel in business, college and the military. Our award winning High School musical production was renewed with a performance adapted to the Covid-19 circumstances. We adapted, we innovated and we were successful.

I remain committed to opposing school regionalization. This is not needed in Trumbull and I fully support School Resource Officers in our schools.

I am committed to looking for efficiencies between the Board of Education and the Town. Those discussions are underway.

When I was elected I committed to accelerating investment in our school system. Including this coming budget year, my administration will have added 12 million dollars to the BOE budget.

This accelerated investment has allowed us to maintain our great reputation. I believe that investment in education is a wise investment. Our strong property values coupled with the success of our students shows that our investment continues to be successful. Thank you to our new Superintendent Dr. Martin Semmel.

PUBLIC SAFETY: Public safety has always been and will always one of most important priorities. This was never more evident than during this pandemic. Led by Police Chief Mike Lombardo, EMS Chief Leigh Goodman, Health Director Lucy Bango, Fire Marshall and Emergency Management Director Megan Murphy, Public Works Director George Estrada, and Human Resources Director Tom McCarthy and their respective teams, collectively and cooperatively we were able to keep our residents and our employees safe and secure.

Whether it be responding to health or police emergencies, plowing our roads, cleaning up after major weather events, or setting up testing and vaccination sites, these great leaders have stepped up and been a beacon of stability in the most difficult of times.

Our amazing Fire departments and all the selfless volunteers who make up their teams deserve recognition for their outstanding performance each and every year.

My administration has done its part as well. We funded our police. We brought in house our EMS responders for better service to Trumbull, we have invested in equipment, training and technology and we will continue to do so. Whether it be adding security to our parks, renovating the police station or building the beautiful Long Hill Fire Department headquarters, our community and my administration have not talked about supporting our First Responders, we have done it and done it in tangible ways.

CONCLUSION:

I want to thank one more team of people whose tireless efforts often go unrecognized. My staff, Kathy McGannon, Cindy Katske and Alicia Altobelli make our town tick!! They plan events like our Egg Hunt, our Memorial Day Parade, the First Selectman's Golf Classic, and returning this summer on July 2nd and 3rd Trumbull Day! This is a small fraction of what they do. They and the volunteers who support them, make our community special.

Assisting them as a volunteer is Kathy Champion and I was very proud to appoint Kathy, the daughter of a Police Officer and the niece of police officers to our Police Commission where she will bring energy and insight to the role.

This has been a long address and we have covered much ground. I appreciate your patience and your attention. I close with this. It is tough to be a community of choice in the best of times. However, it is in difficult times that the true character of a community is revealed. In 2020 we saw that Trumbull is resilient, it is strong and it is compassionate. As this pandemic recedes, we have much to be proud of and much to celebrate. Trumbull is a great community populated with great citizens supported by tremendous Town Employees.

Truly Trumbull is the place to be!